

# Chapter Twelve – Simon

*Two Weeks Later*

Simon stroked his thumb over the back of Lana's hand as she slept. She looked overly pale in the sterile hospital bed. The surgery was complete, and now she was sleeping soundly. She had briefly woken up after the sedation and asked for him, but had quickly fallen asleep again once he held her hand. Since then, he had only left her long enough to go to the waiting room and tell Kari and the rest of her family that she was doing fine and that he'd let them know when they could come in and see her.

The nurses tried to tell him that he shouldn't be with her and that she needed rest, but her heart rate started increasing when they tried to kick him out and calmed when he was near her again. The nurses reluctantly let him stay after he showed them his doctor's credentials.

Lana stirred and Simon sat straighter in his chair. He gripped her hand a little tighter. A yawn stretched her jaws and then she settled. A smile crossed her face as her lids fluttered open. When she saw him, her eyes, still hazy with painkillers, brightened.

"Hey," she croaked.

"Hey, yourself." He smiled at her. "Need water?"

She nodded, and he held a cup to her so she could sip from a straw. She smiled at him, squeezing his hand. "Evie and Elaine?"

"Kari and Robert have them at the park across the street. I'll text them that you're awake."

"Thank you." She yawned again. "Can you help me sit?"

Simon adjusted the bed, shot off a quick text to Kari, and squeezed Lana's hand again. Even though he'd gotten the report from her surgeon, he still had to hold back from checking her charts himself. She still looked pale and weak, but a little color was returning to her face and her eyes were clearing. He couldn't help but grin at her.

"You're smiling. That's good."

"Well, the surgery was a success; easy and simple; in and out. You'll notice some tenderness in your breast, but, with the implanted shifter tissue, you should be healed in a week. Maybe less."

"Good." Her free hand slowly moved to the breast that they had operated on. Her fingers ran lightly over the bandages beneath her hospital gown, and she winced a little. "Tell me honestly . . . is it smaller?"

Simon shook his head. "Maybe. Honestly, in this outfit, there really isn't any way to tell. But it's okay if it is, you know. If you're really concerned, you can always go get a cosmetic surgeon do so something with it. It's natural to have breasts be different sizes, though."

Lana laughed and shook her head. "No, I don't really care. I guess I might have been concerned about that, but right now I'm just . . . relieved. I was afraid the whole thing was going to have to come off. But now . . . I don't know if I even want to get rid of the scar, you know? Maybe it's the drugs . . . but dudes dig battle scars, right?"

She giggled, then winced as the motion shook her. Simon brushed some hair from her face.

"You're beautiful no matter what."

A smile crossed her lips, then it fell to a frown. She tugged the ends of her hair, staring at it for a long moment. "I'm gonna shave it off."

"What?"

"I'm gonna have it shaved and then make a wig out of it. I decided that just before I went under." Lana took a deep, shuddering breath. "I'm going to lose it anyway when I go into chemo. Honestly, I'm more worried about my hair than about my boobs. You can get these reconstructed easy enough, but wigs always look fake."

Simon couldn't help himself. He leaned forward and kissed her cheek. "It will grow back."

He moved to her lips, lightly brushing his mouth on hers. Her eyelids fluttered, but instead of leaning forward as he hoped, she drew back and shook her head. She looked miserable as she did so, but her eyes were still firm.

He opened his mouth to apologize, but Lana cut him off. "Why did you decide to be a surgeon?"

"The money mostly," Simon answered wryly. "I also heard that surgeons did well with women. But not for why you're thinking . . . I was probably sixteen and trying

to impress Katie. I later married her. She's the reason I decided to specialize in cancer research, too."

Lana cocked her head to one side, eyes wide. In everything they had been through together, he hadn't opened up this much to her, so it was no wonder she was surprised. Simon took a moment to collect his thoughts, then moved the chair a little closer. By this time, Lana's thumb was brushing over the back of his hand, whether consciously or not he didn't know.

"Katie was human. She died of cancer."

Lana's eyes widened.

"I knew from the time I was young that she was the one for me. I thought the only one. When she died, it felt like I had been ripped in half. Nothing had any joy, and I couldn't see a reason why I should go on without her."

Her hand tightened around his. "Is that how you still feel?"

"No." He shook his head. "It went on for a few months, though. Until one day when I was working on a patient and they went into cardiac arrest. I brought them back. That's when I realized that I was a *doctor*. I had a life ahead of me to actually make a difference in other people's lives. So I decided to focus on cancer research – to battle against the disease that took my love from me."

"Simon . . . I had no idea."

He smiled softly at her. "I didn't tell you. The truth is, I never stopped mourning her loss. Or, rather, I didn't allow myself to stop mourning for her. She's been gone for so long, but I haven't been able to let her go. And I refused to ever let myself go through that pain again, so I started sleeping around. I jumped into bed with any woman who showed interest in me. Used it as an excuse to keep them all at arm's length."

His voice was heavy with self-loathing as he shook his head. This was something he didn't want to tell Lana. He didn't want to see the judgment in her eyes. But he had to be honest with her if they were going to have any sort of relationship – no matter what that relationship was.

"I've done terrible things," he admitted. "Destroyed marriages. Broken hearts. Sometimes I hate myself."

"I see," Lana said quietly. She sucked her plump lower lip between her teeth. "So what are you going to do about it?"

"Do about it?"

She shrugged. "Yeah. What are you going to do now?"

Simon's brow furrowed as he thought. What could he do about it? Stop sleeping around, for a start, but that wouldn't undo his past actions. He opened his mouth to ask what she thought he should do, but before he could, the door burst open. The twins rushed in, skidding to a stop at the foot of Lana's bed. Evie chewed on her lip and Elaine looked at him.

"Why're you still here? This isn't the culture hall."

Simon couldn't help but laugh. "Your Mommy wanted me to stay."

Kari came in shortly after. Her face hardened up when she saw him. Simon gave her a polite smile, not moving to leave even though he knew that she would want him to. Elaine tried to climb up onto Lana's bed, but Evie grabbed her and pulled her back, eyes wide. Her nose twitched. She was no doubt smelling all the drugs they had pumped into her mother.

"It's okay. You can sit on the bed," Simon said.

"Yes," Kari said stiffly. "Or you can sit in the chair since *Simon* was just leaving."

Lana sighed. "Kari—"

Simon shook his head. "She's right. I should go. You need rest, and having too many visitors will be too tiring."

He didn't want to leave her, and, by the look on her face, she didn't want him to leave either, but it was for the best. The hostility rolling off Kari wasn't going to be good for anybody, and it certainly wouldn't be useful for Lana's healing. He stood and stretched, then said goodbye and headed back to his office.

Clint was the only one working, filing paperwork. He looked up expectantly as Simon came through the doors.

"Don't you have somewhere you can be?" Simon asked him.

"Well, you don't have a life, so I figured you'd head here straight from the hospital. How is Lana?"

Simon smiled gratefully. "She's good. There were no complications and she was awake and alert when I left. She handled it well, if you ask me; very well. Hopefully, the shifter tissue will prove as fruitful to her as it has our other patients. She gave birth to shifters, so it might take more readily to her, too. I don't know. It's uncharted territory."

Clint nodded, then stood and stretched. "So, what now? Are you guys going to start dating? Is it going to be back to keeping separate lives and moping around while pretending to not mope around and missing her?"

"I don't know. We didn't talk about that."

He considered their conversation. *What are you going to do about it?* He had a feeling that if they were going to have a relationship, something had to change. Something big. Not necessarily for Lana to accept him into her life, but for him to accept being in her life. He needed to prove to himself that he was good enough for her.

"I think . . . I think it's time to make changes," he said slowly. "It's gonna be hard . . . but it's time. I guess the place to start is to call up all the women I've got on speed dial for booty calls and tell them that I'm not going to see them anymore . . ."

Clint rose a brow, looking surprised. "And the married women?"

He flinched. "Same thing. Only with them, I guess I should tell them to talk to their husbands, huh? This isn't going to be fun."

Clint clapped him on the back. "No. It won't. But I have faith in you. If anybody can turn his life around, it's you."

Simon gave him a brief smile before he went to his office and closed the door. He braced himself as he called the first woman. It had to be done. If he was going to have a chance at a future, he had to square away his past.